

COLOSSIANS

Paul: The Ideal Servant
Colossians 1:24-29

INTRODUCTION

Everyone of us has in our minds the ideal pastor or minister. Our ideal is undoubtedly a combination of what we think the Bible teaches a pastor should be, what our religious tradition tell us a pastor should be and what our personal prejudices tell us what a pastor should be.

The Perfect Pastor: “After hundreds of years a model Pastor has been found to suit everyone. He preaches exactly 20 minutes and then sits down. He condemns sin but never hurts anyone’s feelings. He works from 8 am to 10 pm in every type of work from preaching to custodial service. He is 26 years old and has been preaching for 30 years.

He is tall and short, thin and heavy set, handsome but not overpowering. He has one brown eye and one blue eye. His hair is parted in the middle. The left side is dark and straight. The right side is brown and wavy with a balding spot on top showing maturity. He has a burning desire to work with teenagers and spends all of his time with the older folks. He smiles all the time with a straight sober face because he has a sense of humor that keeps him seriously dedicated to his work.

He makes 15 calls a day and spends all of his time evangelizing the unchurched and is never out of his office.

Today we take up a section of scripture which shows us what the ideal servant of Christ really is. The Apostle Paul’s life was a shining example of a true minister of the gospel. This section should be a goal towards which all pastors, preachers and ministers should strive. It might be a mini minister’s manual for effective ministry. It is also a section that gives the average Christian many principles to live by every day. So just because this is written about Paul, it does not mean there are not scriptural principles for the average Christian.

HIS SUFFERING 1:24

Suffering And Joy (1:24a): *Now I rejoice...* --Paul understood that suffering was to be part and parcel of his life. At his conversion, Paul clearly understood he was to suffer for the sake of the gospel. “***But the Lord said to Ananias, ‘Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.’***” This context is about gospel-suffering, suffering as one bears the good news of Jesus Christ to the world. Few men every suffered like Paul for the gospel. In Galatians 6:17, he says, “***I bear on my body the marks of Jesus***”; that is, he had been beaten and stoned for Christ. All kinds of suffering were his lot because he was faithful to Christ. “***I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more***

severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea. I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.” (II Cor. 11:23-27). Paul, as well as all Christians, was appointed to suffer: *“For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him...”* (Philip. 1:29). Furthermore, all who live godly lives as Christians will suffer for the name of Christ: *“In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”* (II Tim. 3:12). It becomes obvious that Christianity is not for pussyfoots, weaklings, cowards, backslappers and goldbrickers. True Christians will suffer for Christ. However, Paul said he “rejoiced” in suffering. What does this mean? Was Paul some kind of masochist who loved to suffer, feel pain and experience anguish? No, he, like all of us, hated physical and emotional pain. He rejoiced in the effects or results of suffering, not the suffering itself. He knew the results of pain would be gain for Christ in his life and the lives of others. *“Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.”* (Jms. 1:12).

Alexander Maclaren says this about Paul: “Aye, it is easy to say fine things about patience in suffering and triumph in sorrow when we are prosperous and comfortable, but it is different when we are in the furnace. This man, with the chain on his wrist, and the iron entering into his soul, with his life in danger, and all the future uncertain, can say, ‘Now, I rejoice.’ This bird sings in a darkened cage.”

Suffering For the Colossians (1:24b): *Now I rejoice in what was my suffering for you.* --This could be better translated, “I am rejoicing in my suffering for you.” Paul was suffering right then for the Colossians, even though he had never met them. How was this possible? Paul was in a Roman prison for his love for Christ and for no other reason. His stand, his suffering in Rome would affect the outcome of Christianity in Colosse. If Paul failed his Lord before Caesar, this would affect the outcome of Christianity in Colosse and all the Roman Empire.

Our faithfulness to Christ today and our willingness to suffer now does not just affect us but it affects our family, our church, our fellow Christians in the U.S.A. and the world and generations to come.

Suffering With Christ (1:24c): *And I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions,...* --This is not an easy verse to understand. The Williams Translation says, “I am filling in what is lacking in Christ’s suffering.” The Amplified Bible says, “And in my own person I am making up whatever is still lacking and remains to be completed on our part of Christ’s afflictions.” This verse seems to teach that Paul’s suffering for Christ somehow adds to and completes the sufferings of Christ.

This in no way refers to the atoning sufferings of Christ. The death of Christ was a once and for all perfect and finished work. Nothing can be added to or taken away from the finished work of Christ. However, Roman Catholics do teach that works are added to the atonement of Christ from this verse. They claim that good works, suffering in purgatory, faithful attendance at mass, the purchase of indulgences can be and need be added to the saving merits of Christ.

The Roman Catholic Church view can be refuted simply by showing that the Greek word for “affliction” is never used in the Bible to refer to atoning sufferings or afflictions. Furthermore, the Roman Church view makes a mockery of the finished work of Christ when he said, **“It is finished”** (Jn. 19:10). Christ’s death was complete to save. His death did not lack in efficacy and nothing can be added to it to save. **“Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.”** (Heb. 10:11,12).

These afflictions are historical suffering Christ endured as he faced the hatred of the world and the Devil. The enemies of Jesus despised Christ with insatiable hatred and wanted to add to His afflictions. But since Christ is no longer physically present on earth, His enemies fling their arrows of hate at his followers (Christians).

Christ today is still enduring afflictions. Christ was enduring afflictions in Paul: **“For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into (in) our lives...”** (II Cor. 1:5). The thought is that the union between Christ and His people is so intimate - He the Head, they the body - that He suffers when they suffer. Christ’s non-atoning suffering continues in his people.

Paul first learned this on the road to Damascus when he was converted to Christ. When Christ sovereignly appeared to Paul. Christ said. **“Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me”** (Acts 9:9)? Christ had died, was risen from the dead and was sitting at the right hand of the Father. How was Christ being persecuted by Paul? Saul was persecuting Christians. Christ and the Christian are in an inseparable spiritual union. So when Christians are persecuted, Christ is persecuted. To touch a Christian with hatred and violence is to touch Christ.

Suffering For the Church (1:2~): **For the sake of his body, which is the church.** --Paul also suffered for the Church in general. This is why Paul rejoiced in suffering because he knew it was helping the church. He did not rejoice in the act of suffering (he was undoubtedly miserable) but he was rejoicing in what the suffering was producing - a mature church. This is why Paul could say, **“We glory in tribulation; I take pleasure in reproaches; most gladly, therefore, will I rather suffer.”**

The Lord Jesus died for the Church. The Apostles suffered for the Church. The Reformers became outcasts for the Church. Others have died and born afflictions for God’s blood-bought Church. Can we do less today? How much have we suffered for the gospel? Have we been afflicted for the cause of Christ?

In The 16th century, there were two great Christian martyrs in the Church of England - Bishop Latimer and Bishop Ridley. They were tied to the stake and burned for opposing the Roman Church. As the flames came up around them, Ridley encouraged Latimer by saying, "Be of good cheer, Master Ridley. By the grace of God we'll light a candle in England today that shall never be put out!"

HIS COMMISSION 1:25

Servant of The Church (1:25a): ***I have become its (church) servant by the commission God gave me...*** --Paul had been commissioned by God to be a servant of the church, not an entertainer, not a superstar, not a programmer, but a servant to do whatever is necessary for the Church of Jesus Christ to go forward, even suffering if necessary. So when we suffer, it is not only a joy but a duty.

Presenter of The Word (1:25b): ***...to present to you the word of God in its fullness.*** --God called Paul and all ministers of the gospel to preach the whole counsel of God without compromise to a lost and dying world. ***"In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage -- with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry."*** (II Tim 4:1-5). It is not important what men think of our ministries but it is super-important what Christ thinks for every minister of the gospel will one day give an account to Christ at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

HIS MESSAGE 1:26,27

The Mystery Hidden (1:26): ***The mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints.*** --In this context, Paul narrows his preaching of the whole counsel of God to one specific area. He calls it a "mystery." The word "mystery" to us means something hidden, mysterious thoughts withheld from the masses and revealed only to an exclusive group. This is how the heretical Gnostics used this term at Colosse, indicating that the true religion was found in their particular brand of knowledge, ritual and code words. They claimed only the Gnostics could understand the mystery of salvation. However, in the New Testament, the Word "mystery" means "the revealing of something hidden in the past but is now fully revealed." This mystery could not be known except by divine revelation. The mystery Paul is talking about was essentially hidden from the Jews in the Old Testament and to all generations of Gentiles until Christ. This hidden secret is now open to everyone.

The Mystery Disclosed (1:27): ***To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*** --Now Paul tells us the mystery that has been hidden from Old Testament Jew and the whole Gentile world. The mystery is Christ in you (Christ indwelling Gentiles who believe in Christ). What is so startling about that? Well, you and I have lived with 2000 years of church history behind us, so we just accept the fact that Christ is in Gentiles who believe. But this was revolutionary truth to both Jews and Gentiles in the first century.

It was never a secret in the Old Testament that God would bless the Gentiles but this blessing would be through the Jews. (Mal. 1:11). The Jews believed that Israel would be the means for the Gentile blessing but Gentiles would be subordinate to Jews. But what Paul is teaching is that Gentiles who believe in Messiah in the New Covenant church are partakers in Israel's promises, inheritors of Israel's covenants. Jews and Gentiles are on an equal spiritual plain in Christ (Eph. 3:2-6).

Christ dwells in all His people, whether Jew or Gentile and this truth is the basis for all Christian living and our hope of eternal bliss in heaven. ***"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."*** (Gal. 2:20).

HIS PURPOSE 1:28

To Proclaim (1:28a): ***We proclaim him,*** --Paul proclaimed Christ, not church, not law, not programs, not good works, not methods, not a theological system but Christ. With the authority of God, Paul preached Christ, but not only Paul did this. The "we" indicates this was the practice and policy of all the first century preachers. He preached Christ, the Messiah, Fulfiller of the Covenant, Savior of sinners, Lord of the universe, Creator of the world, hope of eternal life and King of all. Christ is what the preacher preaches because Christianity is Christ.

It was said of John Wesley that, unlike other preachers, when he came into town he offered them Christ.

To Admonish: ***Admonishing (everyone)*** --The word "admonish" in context means "to warn." The Apostle Paul warned everyone with whom he came in contact about sin, judgment and hell. This is a negative message. It is the dark side of the gospel. Nevertheless it is essential to warn all unsaved men and women of eternal judgment whether they believe it or not or whether they want to hear it or not. Surely this warning would include the rebuking of professing Christians who give no evidence with their lives they are true believers.

To Teach (1:28c): ***And teaching everyone with all wisdom.*** --Paul not only told men and women about the certainty of judgment, but he taught them about Christ and what He did to enable people to escape judgment. Paul taught redemption, propitiation, forgiveness, reconciliation, adoption and many other concepts which all revolve around Christ.

Notice Paul did not proclaim Christ in a vacuum. He taught truth or doctrine about Christ so all men would have a clear understanding of who Christ is and what He came to do.

This teaching was to be done “in all wisdom.” Paul was not obnoxious in his presentation of the gospel. He presented it with wisdom, tact, love, poise, winsomeness and confidence, and always in a way which was easy for men to hear even though they may not have liked what they heard.

To Mature (1: 2~): ***So that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.*** --The word “perfect” may be translated “complete” or “mature”. Paul’s driving passion was to see people saved and to bring them to maturity in their Christian experience, knowing full well that one day he would present them all perfect before the Judgment Seat of Christ. It is not enough to get a person saved. That person must be nurtured to Christian maturity.

Notice the repetition of the word “everyone.” Paul understood that the gospel was to be presented to “everyone”; it was a universal gospel for mankind. “Everyone” is stressed because the Gnostic heretics at Colosse were saying their group was the only way, the right way and the true way but it was for the religious elite and closed to all who would not accept their rituals, mysteries and philosophy.

We must repeat again that the ministry is to be Christo-centric - centered in Jesus Christ. A Christianity without Christ at the center is no Christianity at all!

In the word “everyone” we see it was Paul’s plan to speak to everyone who came within the sphere of his influence. If they were not Christians, he warned and taught them about Christ. If they were Christians, he sought to bring them to spiritual maturity. God providentially brought every person into his life for a purpose.

HIS MINISTRY 1:29

Accomplished By Human Labor (1:29a): ***To this end I labor,*** --Paul sought to warn, teach and mature men with such toil that he worked to the point of exhaustion at it. He exerted all his human strength to see men converted to Christ and built up in Christ.

Accomplished By Divine Energy (1:29b): ***Struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.*** --Paul struggled or agonized but not in his own strength, He labored in the supernatural power of Christ. Notice Paul acknowledges that Christ is working in him now, and he learned to call upon that divine energy by faith. Paul learned the key to tapping the power of Jesus Christ who lived in him.

I think we can safely say that Paul was under the influence of Christ, addicted to the ministry and determined to turn the world upside down for Christ. Are you?

Billy Graham said, “If Christianity is important at all, it is all important. If it is anything at all, it is everything. It is either the most vital thing in your life, or it isn’t worth bothering with.”

CONCLUSION

If Paul were here today, he would say to every non-Christian, “I warn you of God’s certain judgment to come if you do not repent, changing your mind about Christ, and I teach you that Christ came to save sinful, lost men, so they can experience God’s love, God’s peace, God’s forgiveness, God’s mercy and God’s grace, and these things you can experience if you will believe that Jesus Christ died for your sins

Paul would say, “Trust Christ as your Savior for sin and Lord of your life and He will change your life, giving you a new purpose for life, a new power for living and a new hope for eternity